

Impact of Covid-19 on Sri Lankan National Level Athletes from an Event Cancellation Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic is a huge problem in the field of sports. Hence, the present study aims to examine the impact of COVID-19 on sports field especially on the national level athletes of Sri Lanka from a sports event cancellation perspective. A cross-sectional survey was conducted using event cancellation as the independent variables, athletes' perceptual satisfaction as the dependent variable, and perceived stress as the mediating variable using Sri Lankan national level athletes 150 (n=150). A convenient sampling method was used to select the survey participants. Data were analysed using SPSS software (version 22.0). Results revealed that, there were significant relationships between perceived stress and athletes' perceived satisfaction, perceived expectation on event cancellation and perceived stress, and a mediation effect by the perceived stress on the relationship between perceived expectation on event cancellation and athletes' perceived satisfaction. Therefore, it is required to consider in formulating proper strategies and programs to manage the consequences of cancellations of scheduled sports events and to reduce the stress level and to improve athletes' perceived satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Athletes' Perceptual Satisfaction, Stress, Perceptual Expectation on Event Cancellation

1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus which was initially found in Wuhan, China in December 2019 has caused a global pandemic with resulting in unexpected uncertainties in every socio-economic framework (World Health Organisation, 2020). Apart from that, due to the lockdown and social distancing, schools, universities, and other educational institutes have been closed worldwide causing psychological issues among children (Lee, 2020). Almost every sector including banking, transportation, insurance, education as well as health has been negatively impacted due to the unexpected break of COVID-19 (Ozili & Arun, 2020). Being considered a major contributor to social and economic development, the field of sports has also been affected by the Coronavirus crisis (Bas et al., 2020). To stop the spread of the virus, almost all the games including basketball, cricket, football, and rugby; from regional to international level all the mass sports gatherings have been postponed or canceled. For the first time in history, the Olympics and Paralympics have been rescheduled to 2021. Even in Sri Lanka, the cricket tour of India and South

Africa was called off due to the pandemic situation (PTI, 2020).

When it comes to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on athletes, the quality and quantity of training have been interrupted. This interruption has damaged athletes physically, technically, and psychologically. The physical performance capacity and competitiveness of athletes have decreased due to the distancing of the athletes from daily training schedules. Home confinement has become a negative life event through mental stress and tension on athletes (Pensgaard et al., 2021). Thus, this study is focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the field of sports concerning Sri Lankan national level athletes, exploring, how perceived expectation of event cancellation cause stress and how stress has affected the athletes' perceived satisfaction.

1.1. Problem Statement

The prevailing COVID-19 situation has affected almost all the socio-economic sectors globally where it has caused the cancellation of sports events around

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the world (Baldwin, 2020). Being physically inactive and having longer screen time on technological devices have resulted in various negative impacts on well-being. These include lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns, improper diets, loss of physical fitness, and gain of weight. Not only lockdowns, but also social distancing have also resulted in mental health problems among the community. Inability to engage in sports which act as the medium for children to learn conflict management, respectful competition, and many other survival skills have caused the players to suffer from stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues (Bas et al., 2020). Hence it is important to have a better understanding of the prevailing situation and the necessary effective measures that should be taken to overcome this crisis. Thus, this study is aimed at, what is the impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lankan national level athletes from an event cancellation perspective?

1.2. Major Objective of the Study

The major objective of this present study is to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the field of sports in national-level athletes of Sri Lanka from an event cancellation perspective.

1.3. Specific Objectives

There are two specific objectives of this present study as follows.

1. To determine the impact of stress on athletes' perceived satisfaction.

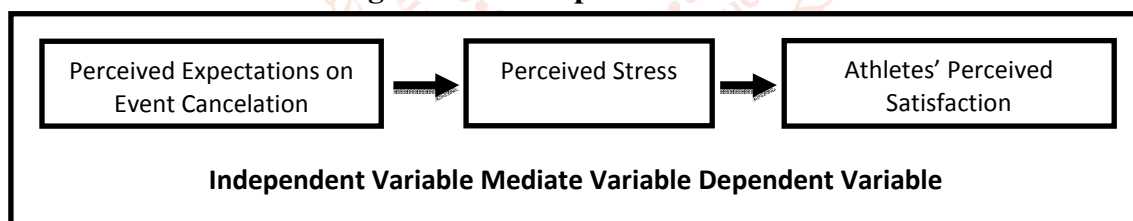
2. To determine the mediating effect of perceived stress on the relationship between perceived expectation of event cancellation and athletes' perceived satisfaction.

1.4. Conceptualization and Operationalization

The previous studies have identified one critical factor which affects the national athletes' perceived satisfaction. One of the critical predicting factors identified was the perceived expectations on event cancellation. The mediation factor that has been identified was perceived stress. Based on the previous studies, the present study considered that the national athletes' perceived satisfaction as the dependent variable and perceived expectations on event cancellation as the independent variable while perceived stress was considered as the mediation variable which influences on the relationship between the independent variable and the depending variables. Further, all the variables have been considered concerning the Covid-19 pandemic context. All the independent, mediating and dependent variables were operationalized with regard to different related dimensions and indicators based on empirical studies. Accordingly, the questionnaire was developed based on the empirical studies as the survey instrument.

Figure 01 presents the conceptual framework developed for the present study which diagrammatically explains the relationship between independent, mediate and dependent variables which has been used as the base for the present study.

Figure 01: Conceptual Framework



Source: Compiled by Author, 2021

1.5. Hypothesis Development

This study aims to investigate the impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lankan national-level athletes from an event cancellation perspective. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable with the meditative effect of perceived stress on the above independent and dependent variables. In the case of this study, the hypotheses were mainly concerned with the analysis of the correlation between the independent and dependent variables, and the mediation variable examines the mediation effect on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. To analyse the relationship between variables and to test the effect of the mediation variable, the researchers tested the following hypotheses:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between stress and athletes' perceived satisfaction.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between perceived expectation of event cancellation and perceived stress.

H₃: Stress mediates the relationship between perceived expectation of event cancellation and athletes' perceived satisfaction.

2. Methodology

2.1. Population and Sample

The present study focuses on the impact of COVID-19 on the field of sports concerning Sri Lankan national level athletes from an event cancellation perspective. Accordingly, the population consists of all the national-level athletes, but the population cannot be determined as there is no sampling frame. Therefore, the sample size is determined based on the study of Fox-Harding et al. (2021) which is similar to the present study. Accordingly, the sample size was determined as 150 ($n = 150$). Using convenient sampling method, data was collected from the population (Fox-Harding et al., 2021).

2.2. Data Gathering Techniques

In the data collection process, quantitative data were collected. To collect data, three standard questionnaires were used (Pillay et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2015; Cohen et al., 1997) and developed into a single questionnaire. It was electronically distributed among Sri Lankan national level athletes via social media platforms including WhatsApp and Email. In this way, the primary data were collected. The questionnaire was distributed among one hundred and fifty (150) Sri Lankan national level athletes. The questionnaire has consisted of 4 sections including demographic factors (7 multiple choice questions), section for perceived expectations of event cancellation (20 questions), section for perceived stress (10 questions), and the final section for the athletes' perceived satisfaction (7 questions). The questionnaire was developed in Five-point Likert scale which varies from strongly disagrees to strongly agree for study variables ranging from 1-5.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS software 22.0 version. The first step was to clean the data and check for missing values. After cleaning the data sheet, descriptive analysis was conducted. Thereafter, the reliability of each study variable was tested and normality of the data was checked. Since the study intends to examine the impact of COVID-19 on Sri Lankan national level athletes. Finally, two hypotheses were tested using Spearman correlation coefficient and another hypothesis was tested using regression analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 provides the reliability statistics of all study variables and since Cronbach's Alpha values of all study variables are more than 0.7, all variables' measurement scales were considered as reliable.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	Perceived Expectations on Event Cancellation	Perceived Stress	Athletes' Perceived Satisfaction
Cronbach's Alpha Value	0.718	0.755	0.748

Table 2 provides the correlation coefficients between the independent variable and the dependent variable of the study. Accordingly, there is a significant negative relationship between perceived stress and athletes' perceived satisfaction, and there is a significant positive relationship between the perceived expectations on event cancellation and perceived stress.

Table 2: Correlation Results

Variable	Stress and athletes' perceptual satisfaction	Perceptual expectation on event cancellation and Stress
Correlation coefficient	-.199	.316
Sig. (2- tailed)	.014	.000

Table 3 provides the regression analysis to examine the mediation effect on the relationship between the independent and dependent variable of the present study.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Test Results

Hypothesis	Direct effect	Indirect effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
H ₃ : Stress mediates the significant relationship between the perceived expectations on event cancellation and athletes' perceived satisfaction	.8801	-.1968	.0588	-.3228	-.0920

The results revealed that there is a mediation effect of perceived stress on the relationship between the perceived expectations on event cancellation and the athletes' perceived satisfaction. The mediation effect presents as -0.1968 and Boots strapping confidence value presents BootsSE as 0.0588, BootLLCI as -0.3228, and BootULCI

as -0.0920. According to boot values, BootLLCI and BootULCI, both values were less than 0.0 and it means, there is a mediation effect of perceived stress on the perceived expectations on event cancellation and athletes' perceived satisfaction.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of COVID-19 on national-level athletes in Sri Lanka from an event cancellation perspective. This study has made an empirical contribution for the sports context during a pandemic time period and according to the research findings, perceived expectations on event cancellation causes stress, and perceived stress has affected the athletes' perceived satisfaction. Accordingly, it is proved that the three hypotheses were accepted and there has an impact of the COVID-19 on national level athletes from an event cancellation perspective.

4.1. Recommendations

The present study identified the impact of COVID-19 on national-level athletes in Sri Lanka from an event cancellation perspective. In this study, it can be identified that there is a relationship between athletes' perceived satisfaction and perceived stress. Therefore, motivation programs and online zoom (technology-based) meeting gatherings, and also counseling with doctors can be recommended to minimize the stress of the individuals. That method can minimize the stress level in athletes and then can improve their perceived satisfaction. It is also important for athletes to mitigate their stress levels in good range using the proper way.

According to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of sports events were canceled. In this study, it is identified the effect of perceived expectations on event cancellation on the athletes' perceived satisfaction. Then, the government can make the bio-bubble concept and conduct sports events which will facilitate athlete satisfaction and national level sports activities also. Furthermore, instead of canceling sports events, events can be postponed because sports events are a big opportunity for the athletes and their sports career.

4.2. Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on a newly identified virus that influences athletes. Therefore, there are inadequate reference materials to find precise information regarding early studies. Also, difficulties in collecting data freely due to the prevailing pandemic situation and difficulties in reaching all the national sport team athletes to gather information are some limitations.

This study only focused on event cancellation, perceived stress, and athletes' perceived satisfaction which can be expanded into more scopes exploring more related study variables.

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